

Certificates: Occupancy vs. Completion

The City of Goose Creek issues two types of certificates for buildings and structures, Certificate of Occupancy and Certificate of Completion. The following information is to clarify the purpose of each certificate, when it is used and why one would be issued instead of the other.

CERTIFICATE of OCCUPANCY

A Certificate of Occupancy, or “CO”, is issued to establish the occupancy classification on new structures, on substantially reconstructed structures that must be rebuilt due to extensive or structural damage, and when existing structures are repurposed for a new and different occupancy classification and use. Also, additional State/code required information is included on this document such as when sprinklers are installed/required, if there are any special conditions or restrictions of use, etc. Of note, the Certificate of Occupancy is only provided to the legal owner of the property that was in force at the time of CO issuance. For more specifics on how occupancy classification is assigned see <https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/IBC2021P1/chapter-3-occupancy-classification-and-use>.

When a change of the occupancy classification for a structure is required to allow for a different type of occupancy or activity, a request for that must be made through the Building Inspection Division. This typically happens in two ways: 1) The owner would need to request a building safety inspection permit and list “change of occupancy classification” in the scope of work. This may also require a design professional to evaluate and create a life safety plan. 2) The owner can hire a design professional to produce stamped drawing that includes a code analysis which includes a new occupancy classification, along with renovation plans. At the end of the renovation, a new Certificate of Occupancy would be issued automatically to the building’s owner. In both cases, the owner needs to make the request or submit a letter authorizing the occupancy classification change.

CERTIFICATE of COMPLETION

This document can be/is used whenever construction of any scope is performed and the occupancy classification does not change. Also, a “CoC” (Certificate of Completion) would be issued in the case of a shell (sometimes referred to as a vanilla shell) structure that has not been completed because its final use has not been proposed or established. It is issued to the contractor to show that the scope of work that was listed on the plans has been completed and inspected for code compliance. This does not necessarily mean that the structure is complete, only that the permitted and inspected work has been documented. Typically, not all finish, painting and touch-up work will be complete at the issuance of the CoC.

Another use for the CoC is when the owner wishes to use the property in a limited fashion prior to the issuance of a “CO”. A Certificate of Completion, listing limits and variables, is often used to set up a mercantile or business occupancy in preparation of opening to the public. Typically inventory and staff training can take place, but the business cannot open to or service the public until the final “CO” has been issued.

For any additional information contact the Building Inspection Bureau at 843.553.8350 ex1407